



CHANDRAPRABHA SAIKIANI'S THOUGHT AND THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

A society is reflected through the culture of the people. This culture is carried out by the thought and attitude of an individual, a family, the community people and the era of a particular period of time. Today's existing society is the outcome of a long period of time. The efforts, hard work, contribution of lots of people in every era build up today's existing situation. It is the result of the contribution of lots of greatest personalities including Raja Rajmohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Amiya Kumar Das, Gunaviram Barua, Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Padmabhusan Pushpalata Das, Padmashree Chandraprabha Saikiani and many more.

The importance of men and women are indispensable to continue human civilisation. Men are always given priority in male dominated society like India. It was so strange in the first half of 20th century when rigid patriarchal system was carried out by the society, the versatile lady Chandraprabha Saikiani was born in a very interior village 'Daisingri' of the undivided Kamrup District. Her extraordinary thought and action provoked a peculiar situation in that patriarchal system. By her efforts, strong determination, hard work she with the help of Kironmoyi Agarwala (Mother of Jyotiprasad Agarwala) actively did a lot for the womenfolk of Assam organising "The Assam Mahila Samiti".

The present paper is an attempt to focus on Chandraprabha Saikiani's thought reflected in the contemporary society.

KEYWORDS: Men, Women, Society, Right, Gender

INTRODUCTION

The prominent Assamese novelist and poet Padmabhusan Nabakanta Barua in a article," Upanyashar Nayika Chandraprabha" published in the 'Smritigantha' (16th March, 2001-2002) on the birth anniversary of Padmashree Chandraprabha Saikiani has analysed the characterisation of the novel Abhijatri written by Nirupama Borgohain. Nabakanta Barua was happy to share the role of his father Nilakanta Barua sending Chandraprabha Saikiani to Nagaon Mission School. It is a golden opportunity for both studious girls Chandraprabha Saikiani (The dominant lady in the field of women education, women empowerment and women movement) and Rajaniprabha Das (The first MBBS Lady Doctor from Assam). The serious matter is that at the present contemporary society, there are lots of doors opened to all the hard workers, the studious students but at the time of the first half of twentieth century societal norms were totally different where rigid patriarchal system was applied strictly. But the thought of Chandraprabha Saikiani was far ahead of the time and touch the present contemporary situation. Though Abhijatri is a novel but Nirupama Borgohain draws the real picture of a real village born girl Chandraprabha Saikiani and of course her thought and action has heralded the womenfolk not only of Assam but also the entire world.

Statement of the Problem: Chandraprabha Saikiani's thought and the contemporary society.

Objectives of the Study:

This paper is an attempt

- To highlight the existing problems for a lady in the first half of 20th century.
- How this versatile lady Chandraprabha Saikiani's thought is extraordinary.
- The impact of Chandraprabha Saikiani's thought in contemporary society.

Delimitation of the Study:

Chandraprabha Saikiani is a lady with multifaceted personality. She is the mastermind to organise women organisation emphasised on different social issues. She can't be discussed without referencing freedom movement. But considering the type and scope of the topic, the present paper is only concerned with Chandraprabha Saikiani's thought in contemporary society which is bothered with gender disparity. From the Sainiani's writing profile, only "pitri-Vitha", the first novel by Saikiani is going to discuss in this paper.

Methodology of the Study:

Due to the concerned topic the methodology of the paper is analytical, qualitative, library research. Both primary and secondary data are collected and analysed in the study.

Primary data are collected from conducting interview schedule and from some print documents, like a memoir of Chandraprabha Saikiani, and secondary data are collected from some magazines, journals, books and internet.

Discussion and Analysis:

According to Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (8th edition), The meaning of the term 'Contemporary' is 'belonging to the same time' and 'Society' means 'people in general'. The overall meaning of the term 'The Contemporary Society' is people belonging to the same age. The Contemporary Society of Chandrababha Saikiani was rigid and patriarchal in nature. There is gender disparity in case of education system as well as at home and in society. It was totally male dominated society. Women are trained to do household work and men are involved in their farm and other outward world. Women also helped in the paddy field related works but all these are unpaid, unrecognised. The male figures were considered as more powerful, dignified to keep any decision in any respect.

The influence of Britishers along with Christian and American missionaries changed a lot the entire social system in India. The Britishers emphasised on spreading education to prepare some persons to appoint in the office work so as they can save money not hiring resources from outside. On the other hand, the missionary ladies mainly wished to develop the upbringing of women around the world making them self-independent. The missionaries first established Madrasa and Muktaba for this purpose in Arabic language. The first school was opened in the year 1830 by the initiatives of British Missionary James Rey in Guwahati. Though it was not continued. The Guwahati Seminari was established after that under the active effort of General Jenkins. The missionaries opened the first school in Sibsagar (Sadiya) in the first week of the month of June 1836. In 1840, then opened in Nagaon and Guwahati respectively. The missionaries were involved to publish monthly magazine 'Arunodai' from the Sibsagar Mission Press. As a result, in between 1860-1861 in Sibsagar the first Girls' School was established.

These are the positive aspects started in Assamese society to develop the entire scenario of Assam by the Britishers, Missionaries with the help of Assamese personalities like-Gunaviram Baruah, Anandaram Dhekiyal Fukan, Jyotiprasad Agarwala. Chandrababha Saikiani documented the rigid patriarchal system in her memoir Pradeshi Mahila Samiti Itibritta (Published by Pradeshi Mahila Samiti, Guwahati in 1960), Pitriyitha, Sekh Ashray, Aparajita, Akul Pathik, Daibaghya Duhita. Also, the contemporary society of Chandrababha Saikiani was reflected in the then published journals- Abhijatri, Mou, Awahan etc. The attitude of some people was that if the women became free from all burdens and able to take decision by themselves then women could not be controlled, dominated.

Chandrababha Saikiani was born to Ratiram Majumdar and Gangapriya in 1901 in the interior village Daisingri. Ratiram Majumdar was the Village Head of the village Daisingri. He was a learned person and people from different categories came to meet him. Again, Ratiram Majumdar accustomed to read Bengal books and journals available at that time. That means Chandrababha Saikiani was lucky to have a cultured father. After the birth Of Chandrababha, her parents came to know her emotion who can do something different in her life. Due to the

lack of School nearby them, they talked to Chenipriya, the sister of Gangapriya to facilitate their children for studies. Chenipriya, the maternal aunt of Chandrababha had done the great job to admit Chandrababha, Rajaniprabha and Dharmeswar in The Bhaluki primary school nearby their home. Whatever may be that was the first turning point for the Iron Lady of Assam -Chandrababha Saikiani being admitted in primary school.

Having completed the primary school, Chandrababha was in distressed not to have any facility for further study. Ratiram Majumdar managed them to admit in Barshidhani Highschool (source: Personal Interview with Kanthiram Deka, the ex-teacher of Barshidhani Highschool on 2nd April 2022). The villagers insulted both the girls to admit in a boys' school. But they were adamant not to leave the school and continued for a time. The prolific writer Nirupama Borgohain has started her novel 'Abhijatri' (based on Chandrababha Saikiani's life and got Sahitya Akademi Award for this novel Abhijatri) giving a pen picture of the worst communication to go to school by foot and the reaction of Saikiani to Rajaniprabha when she wished to discontinue to go there throwing a leech from her leg. Chandrababha could think far ahead of her time. She would like to clear to Rajaniprabha that their lives also would be the same as the women staying at home like the other animals -cows, buffalo who are fully dependent on their owner. May be such an extraordinary thought of Saikiani encouraged Rajaniprabha to be the first lady doctor of Assam. Not only Rajaniprabha, Saikiani leads a mass of women folk. After all they had to leave the school mainly for the communication in summer season. At that time road were not distinct which submerged with water everywhere. Saikiani could not stay at home for a long time and searched for the opportunity to do something special.

By the initiatives, hard-work and determined mind to provide education for the girls Chandrababha Saikiani herself opened a school in the village Akaya, almost 5 km away from her home in 1913-14. Saikiani collected girl children from the neighbourhood of the school. The school was named as 'Abhinava'. Some dynamic villagers of Akaya helped the lady teacher to prepare desk -benches made by bamboo. Saikiani taught the students by heart. This hard work of Saikiani was acknowledged by the then Sub Inspector of School, Nilakanta Barua (father of the renowned poet Nabakanta Barua). That was the another turning point for Chandrababha Saikiani. With her only primary education opening a school at 12 years old and wholeheartedly doing a good job for the development of the girl's education really impressed Nilakanta Barua. He talked to Chandrababha for the probability of further studies and provided the facilities of admitting in Nagaon Mission School by these two girls- Padmashree Chandrababha Saikiani who is the pioneer of women education, women empowerment along with leader in freedom movement and Rajaniprabha Das who became the first lady MBBS doctor in Assam.

Chandrababha Saikiani was always in the sense of module her as a human being not as a woman only. For Saikiani, there is not any difference between men and women except the genitalia. It is only the attitude of some people to treat women as deteriorate to men. But women are so spiritually powerful that if they

wish to do something as a challenge, they prove it in real life situation. Saikiani proved it in her personal life. Contextually, Saikiani came in touch with Dandinath Kalita, a writer belonged to Tezpur when she was working as Head Teacher in Tezpur girls ME school. Saikiani was involved in doing social work along with Kironmoyi Agarwala, the mother of Jyotiprashad Agarwala. By their initiatives Tezpur Mahila Samiti was established in 1918. Their motto was to give security to the weaker section of the society basically the women. To make them independent they took different activities like weaving, farming, knitting etc. Tezpur Mahila samiti was enlightened more by the visit of Mahatma Gandhi who came to 'Paki', the residence of Agarwala family and observed those spirited Assamese women and declared that without the participation of women, freedom would be a dream for the country. For Gandhiji, women are spiritually more powerful than men. This attitude touched Chandrabhabha in depth. From her earlier period, she opposed all the social barriers, like child marriage, male domination, only male participation in decision making, boys are given primacy in education. But this lady had to face an unexpected situation in her personal life. As a result for the relationship between Dandinath Kalita and Chandrabhabha Saikiani (in some books it is written, after the ritual of Gandharva Vivah), Saikiani became pregnant and asked Kalita to name their relationship in society. But Dandinath Kalita dared not to accept her in that patriarchal society thinking about his reputation. He argued their caste differences and the situation pregnant before marriage would affect this aged parents. Kalita tried to think all except the condition of Chandrabhabha Saikiani. But the lady Saikiani was made of IRON, her thought was far ahead of the time. Her decision-making capacity proved her a lady of IRON heart. Saikiani was in her place, she decided to accept her condition as it was and left Tezpur, sacrificing her job, her reputation as a social activist. What a male figure dared not to do, Saikiani accepted it as a challenge in her life. Saikiani proved herself as more powerful than Dandinath. Of course, it is accepted because though Dandinath Kalita was a writer but he is famous today only related with Chandrabhabha Saikiani more.

Chandrabhabha Saikiani's thought is reflected in her writing. Her published work in Ghar Jeuti are "Nari Sambandhe Baideshik Pandit sakalor Matamot", "Assam Mahila Samiti Dwitiya Barshik Karya bibarani", "Assam Mahila Samiti Golaghatat baha Tritiya Barshik Sanmilani". Also, Pitri-Vitha, Shekh Ashray, Parijat, AkulPathik, Daibagya Duhita, Devi, Jail Kahini etc.

The thought of Saikiani in relation to gender disparity in Pitri-Vitha are seen from different angles. For Madhvi, Men and Women are only two different species. There is not any serious difference except sex. After the death of her father, Mandar Samua, Madhavi took all the responsibilities in her shoulder as like a boy. Her mother forced Madhavi to get marriage soon, Madhavi opposed it directly arguing that within one year after the death of father it is not in the Holy books to be married.

In the novel 'Pitri-Vitha', Madhabi is the only daughter of Mandar Samua. Samua is a reputed person treated Madhabi

always as a human being not as a girl or a woman. Mandar Samua was the owner of Samua estate with a healthy property. For this huge property, He has to pay one lakh rupees to the Government as a tax from the deposited one lakh fifty thousand from the Riot. Samua is profited by Rupees fifty thousand in his hand under this chemistry. But due to the compassion to the riot's not capable to manage the money, he could not be strict much and gave time them to pay later. Samua paid the tax of riots from his hand and the riots became totally dependent to pay their tax on Mandar Samua. Samua sold his property to save the riot's and gradually he sold everything and got demised. In that moment what the reaction of Madhabi, the only daughter of Samua is point to ponder. Madhabi wished to perform everything as the ritual after the death of her father. She sold some household property and asked for help from Madhab, the lover and the most important person for her at that crucial period to save the legacy of her father and the reputation. Madhab could not understand the emotion of Madhabi at that time and left her alone not responding seriously. Madabi kept the decision to marry Damodar who came to help her according to the announcement she did earlier. When there was no way to save the legacy of her father and to survive with ill mother, Madhabi announced to marry with the person who could manage to repay the huge amount. Damodar was ready to help her. Though Madhabi could not accept Damodar but she saved the legacy sacrificing her life and proved that there is no gender disparity against willpower.

CONCLUSION

Padmashree Chandrabhabha Saikiani was born in a rigid patriarchal society who can think far ahead from her contemporary period, early phase of twentieth century. Her thought for the education and empowerment of women, judgement for gender disparity is a focal point to influence till today. Dr. Govinda prasad Sarma considered Saikiani's novel Pitri-Vitha (published in 1937) as the first Assamese Feminist novel in his book, "Naribad aru Asamiya Upanyas" (page 45). All her thought, action, speech, writing is centred around the societal norms- gender disparity, child marriage, women education, women empowerment, untochability. For the development of our country, we should discuss and analyse the thought of such a great personality like Chandrabhabha Saikiani who did a lot in her time for gender disparity.

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